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“Sniffing Out Terrorism: The Use of Dogs in Homeland Security”

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The Use of Dogs in a Transit Police Environment

The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) Police Department is the law enforcement agency responsible for protection of persons and property on transit system properties and in transit vehicles. The transit system encompasses approximately twenty-three political jurisdictions in two counties. The Police Department is authorized 296 sworn and 43 civilian positions.

The U.S. and Georgia Departments of Homeland Security have identified MARTA as a critical infrastructure component. Historically, transit systems throughout the world have been targets of terrorist attacks. The recent attacks against transit systems in Madrid, Spain and London, Great Britain illustrate the successful tactic of targeting a public transit facility with many potential casualties and the subsequent political and economic consequences.

The MARTA Police Department, in an attempt to deter terrorist attacks, has developed specialized response teams, a system of threat assessment, and a system of public education and notification of potential threats. Specialized response teams include the Bomb Squad, the Special Operations Response Team, and the Canine Explosives Detection Unit.

MARTA is typical of U.S. transit systems, in that free movement into and out of the system is by design, for the convenience of customers. Unfortunately, this design handicaps the securing of those facilities during times of heightened alert. Unlike airports, each transit station can be accessed by the public through multiple entrances.

Rather than restricted entry methods, transit systems depend upon other security measures to deter terrorist attacks. The explosive detection canine program is a vital tool in that deterrence. Canines are highly visible, flexible in their positioning, and cost effective.

The presence of a canine team, one uniformed police officer paired with one dog, is highly visible to anyone entering a transit facility. The team is mobile, with the ability to move around a large facility or to board transit vehicles, increasing their visibility as they move. Customers at MARTA often express their appreciation for the presence of the teams, indicating that the public is reassured by this security measure.

It is expected that a terrorist attack would be preceded by reconnaissance of a potential target by members of the terrorist group. Visible security measures are intended to convince the potential attacker that the likelihood of a successful attack is minimal. The unpredictable and highly visible presence of canine teams is an important component of that strategy.

The cost of a single canine team, while significant, is cost effective. Detection machines, as currently available, must be placed either at strategic stations and entry points, or at all stations and entry points. Machines are not easily moved, and a prepared terrorist will know where the machines are on any given day. Their planning would include entering the system that does not deploy machines at every entry point. The cost of installing detection equipment at every entry

point in a system is cost prohibitive. Unlike technological detection equipment, canine teams can change locations randomly, as threats develop, or during special events with large crowds.

Visibility, flexibility, and cost effectiveness are some of the reasons for the deployment of canine teams in the MARTA system. Reliability of the teams' ability to detect explosives is another.

The decision was made immediately after the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, to form the MARTA Police Bomb Squad and Explosive Canine Detection Unit. Research of canine programs revealed that reliability of a canine team's ability was critical. Vendors of dogs and training were plentiful; proven programs were not. It was decided that only two programs, the FAA and the ATF, were of sufficient quality and could show quantifiable reliability. MARTA chose the FAA program, and over the years since, has become a full partner in the FAA/TSA program.

The Madrid bombings raised additional concerns about the vulnerability of transit systems to suicide bombers and man-transported explosives. It was felt that this tactic, having been proven successful, would probably be used in the future. An investigation into the ability of our dogs to detect explosives carried by moving people revealed a deficiency in that area.

The TSA dogs were conditioned to ignore people as a distraction. The dogs, although they sometimes showed interest in persons carrying explosives, would not "alert" to them. They would search persons who were presented to them by their handler, as in a stationary group, but would ignore a moving crowd.

A search was made for agencies, training facilities or individuals who had the same concerns or who were actively training dogs to search moving persons, which we had begun to term "personnel search dogs." There was only one positive response to our search; Auburn University Canine Research Center.

The Auburn facility had embarked on a program that met the needs of our department. Funds from an Office of Domestic Preparedness grant were obtained for the purchase and training of two personnel search canines. One of those dogs has been deployed at MARTA for a year, and the second team is presently in training at Auburn.

The MARTA Police Canine Explosive Detection Unit currently consists of eight handler/K-9 teams. Two of those teams are from the Auburn Canine program. The other six teams are in the TSA program, and they are currently the only public transit TSA teams in the country. The TSA is in the process of deploying canine teams to the top 10 transit systems in the U.S.

The MARTA Police Department, along with many police departments in the Atlanta area, is under severe budget constraints. Subsequently, manpower shortages affect the mission of protecting against terrorist attack. The intensive training regimen of explosive detection canine teams requires that officers assigned to the Unit be taken off regular beat assignments. The result is a critical shortage of uniformed patrol officers.

The TSA canine program includes an annual reimbursement to the participating department of \$40,000 for each team the department fields. Although the amount does not cover all expenses

associated with a team, it does help when requesting replacement officer positions from the governing Board. Continuing reimbursement is the most effective means to sustain a substantial canine deterrence.

In late 2004, MARTA and Auburn University hosted representatives from the Sussex County Police, Great Britain, Los Angeles Police Department, the U. S. Department of Energy, and the U. S. Dept. of Homeland Security. The Sussex County and Los Angeles representatives were canine unit supervisors and each department was in the process of forming a personnel search canine program. The participants exchanged training and operational information, and an ongoing network of communication has been established. All representatives agreed that the personnel search K-9 concept, combined with standard canine explosives detection teams, is an effective means of addressing changing trends in terrorist tactics.